



Sixth Edition

*APA Style Guide to*

# Electronic References

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# Electronic Media

Since the release of the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010), online research continues to be the norm and continues to present questions on how to format a variety of web-based materials. Reference formats have evolved, and students and researchers are constantly challenged to create references for content that does not fall into an easily defined area. Because not all online resources have title and copyright pages, the elements for a reference can be difficult to find. As a result, users need guidance on how to format references for online sources.

We have attempted to help readers apply style rules to new formats in posts on the APA Style Blog (<http://blog.apastyle.org/>). We have also responded to reader queries on our Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/APAStyle>) and Twitter ([http://twitter.com/APA\\_Style](http://twitter.com/APA_Style)) pages.

In this guide, we show how to format references for a broad range of electronic sources. We begin by reviewing the four basic components of a reference: author, date, title, and source. Next, we review some general guidelines to remember as you construct your reference list. We then discuss some potentially confusing elements that are unique to electronic referencing, like digital object identifiers (DOIs), uniform resource locators (URLs), and version control. The final section of the guide includes templates and specific reference examples for various types of online sources for you to use as models when creating your reference list. These examples make up the bulk of this document.

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The *APA Style Guide to Electronic References, Sixth Edition*, has been adapted from the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010), Chapters 6 and 7. It also includes some examples derived from the APA Style Blog (<http://blog.apastyle.org/>) that further illustrate existing templates and examples in the *Publication Manual*.

## How References Are Constructed

In general, a reference should contain four elements: the author's name ("who"), date of publication ("when"), title of the work ("what"), and source data ("where"). The four elements always appear in the same order:

Author, A. A. (year). Title. Source.

This is the basic principle behind all APA Style references.

For traditional materials, these components are straightforward. However, for some web-based material, it can be difficult to identify one of more of these elements. Table 1 will help you identify the best way to format challenging web-based material.

If you cannot find the reference example you need in the *Publication Manual*, choose the example that is most like your source and follow that format. Sometimes you may need to combine elements of more than one reference format.

## Notation

If additional information is necessary for identification and retrieval of a reference, it may be included in brackets immediately after the title and any parenthetical information. The use of brackets in references is reserved for nonroutine information. Brackets can also be used to indicate that the title element refers to more than one thing, as in Example 64, where "EyeLink 1000" refers to both "[Apparatus and software]." Following is a sample of information that can be included in brackets (see section 6.29 of the *Publication Manual* for other common examples). Other phrases than these are possible; choose wording that is brief, accurate, and descriptive of the source.

[Apparatus and data file]	[mp3 file]
[Audio file]	[Painting], [Photograph], etc.
[Blog post] or [Blog comment]	[Podcast transcript]
[Brochure]	[PowerPoint presentation]
[Database record]	[Press release]
[Demographic map]	[Real Media file]
[Facebook note] or [Facebook page]	[Supplemental material]
[Lecture notes]	[Television series episode]
[Letter to the editor]	[Television series webisode]
[Measurement instrument]	[Tweet] or [Twitter update]
[Mobile application software]	[Video file]

■ **Table 1**

*How to Cite Something You Found on a Website in APA Style: What to Do When Information Is Missing*

What's missing?	Solution	Reference template			
		Position A	Position B	Position C	Position D
Nothing; I've got all the pieces	n/a	Author, A. A.	(date).	Title of document [Description of form].	Retrieved from http://URL
Author is missing	Substitute title for the author	Title of document [Description of form].	(date).	Retrieved from http://URL	
Date is missing	Use <i>n.d.</i> for <i>no date</i>	Author, A. A.	(n.d.).	Title of document [Description of form].	Retrieved from http://URL
Date is missing, can be reasonably approximated	Use <i>ca.</i> followed by a year, in brackets	Author, A. A.	[ca. date].	Title of document [Description of form].	Retrieved from http://URL
Title is missing	Describe the document inside brackets	Author, A. A.	(date).	[Description of document].	Retrieved from http://URL
Author and date are both missing	Combine author and date methods	Title of document [Description of format].	(n.d.).	Retrieved from http://URL	
Author and title are both missing	Combine author and title methods	[Description of document].	(date).	Retrieved from http://URL	

## General Guidelines

### Consistency

Consistency in reference style is important, especially in light of evolving technologies in database indexing, such as automatic indexing by database crawlers. These computer programs use algorithms to capture data from primary sources as well as from reference lists. If reference elements are out of order or incomplete, the algorithm may not recognize them, which lowers the likelihood that the reference will be captured for indexing. With this in mind, follow the general formats for placement of reference elements and use the electronic reference guidelines detailed in this publication to decide which elements are necessary to allow readers to access the sources you used. Remember, the basic pattern behind all APA Style references is to include author, date, title, and source.

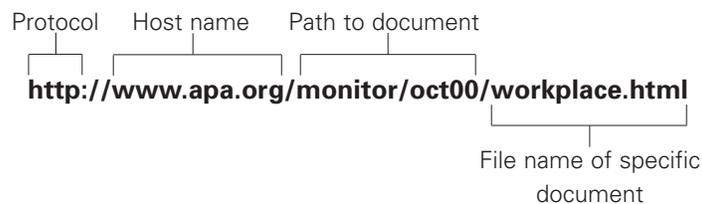
### Use of the Archival Copy or Version of Record

When using journal articles and other “online first” publications retrieved online, be sure that you are citing the most recent version. In-progress and final versions of the same work may coexist on the Internet, which can present challenges in determining which version is most current and most authoritative. It is usually best to cite the final archival version or version of record, which has been peer reviewed and may provide additional links to supplemental material. If the most current version available was an advance version or draft at the time that you originally cited it, recheck the source and update its publication status as close as possible to the publication of your work (see the Providing Publication Data for Electronic Sources section, p. 6).

### Electronic Sources and Locator Information

To understand more about how information is organized on the Internet, we next give some background on URLs and DOIs.

**Understanding a URL.** The URL is used to map digital information on the Internet. The components of a URL are as follows:



*Protocol* indicates which method a web browser (or other type of Internet software) should use to exchange data with the file server on which the desired document resides. The protocols recognized by most browsers are hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP), hypertext transfer protocol secure (HTTPS), and file transfer protocol (FTP). In a URL, the protocol is followed by a colon and two forward slashes (e.g., `http://`). The *host* or *domain name* identifies the server on which the files reside. On the web, it is often the address for an organization’s home page (e.g., `http://www.apa.org` is the address for APA’s home page). Although many domain names start with “www,” not all do (e.g.,

<http://apastyle.apa.org/> is the home page for APA Style, and [http://twitter.com/apa\\_style](http://twitter.com/apa_style) is the home page for APA Style on Twitter). A mistyped URL will make it difficult for readers to retrieve your source. One way to avoid transcription errors is to copy the source's URL from your browser window and paste it directly into your reference list.

The domain name extension (in the preceding example, “.org”) can help you determine the origin of your source. Different extensions are used depending on which entity hosts the site. For example, the extension “.edu” refers to educational institutions; “.gov” and “.mil” are used for government and military sites, respectively; and “.com,” “.biz,” and “.net” are used for commercial sites. Domain name extensions may also include a country code (e.g., “.ca” for Canada or “.nz” for New Zealand). The rest of the address indicates the directory path leading to the desired document.

All content on the Internet is prone to being moved, restructured, or deleted, resulting in broken hyperlinks and nonworking URLs in the reference list. In an attempt to resolve this problem, scholarly publishers have begun assigning a DOI to journal articles and other documents. A DOI is a unique alphanumeric string that identifies content and provides a persistent link to its location on the Internet.

**The DOI System.** Developed by a group of international publishers, the DOI System provides a means of persistent identification for managing information on digital networks (see <http://www.doi.org/>). The DOI System is implemented through registration agencies such as CrossRef (<http://www.crossref.org/>), which provides citation-linking services for the scientific publishing sector.

CrossRef's participants have developed a system that provides two critical functions. First, they assign each source a “unique identifier and underlying routing system” that functions as a clearinghouse to direct readers to content, regardless of where the content resides (Kasdorf, 2003, p. 646). Second, participants collaborate to use the DOI as an underlying linking mechanism embedded in the reference lists of electronic sources that allows click-through access to each reference. CrossRef currently has more than 3,500 participating publishers and scholarly societies. According to recommendations from CrossRef introduced on August 2, 2011, DOIs are now displayed as permanent URLs. This change is meant to make the DOI format more user-friendly; DOIs formatted as actionable links are more recognizable to users than the original alphanumeric string, especially for those not familiar with DOIs (CrossRef, 2011).<sup>1</sup> The following example illustrates the updated DOI format recommended by CrossRef:

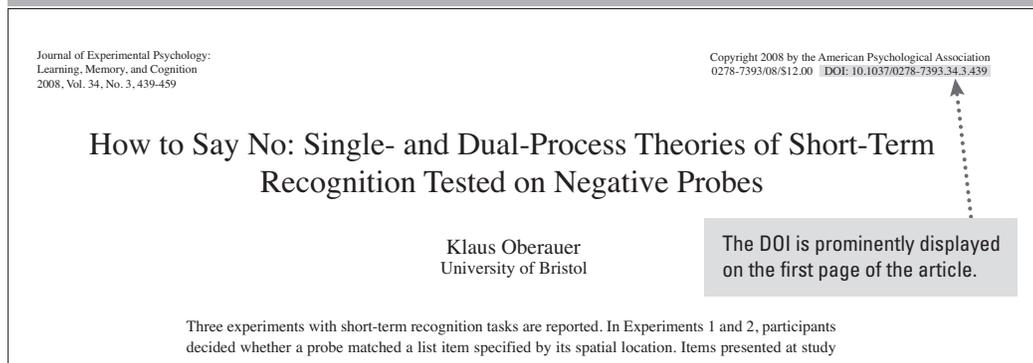
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0024996>

You will find the original and updated DOI formats in your research; include the format that appears on the source you are citing.

**The DOI as article identifier.** Within a DOI, you will see 10. followed by a prefix and a suffix separated by a slash. The prefix is a unique number of four or more digits assigned to organizations; the suffix is assigned by the publisher and was designed

<sup>1</sup>In the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual*, DOIs are formatted according to the initial recommendations from CrossRef: doi:10.xxxxxxxxxx

When the DOI System was first established, *doi:* was expected to become native to browsers and to resolve DOIs automatically. The current format has replaced this and ensures that the DOIs are working links (CrossRef, 2011). Because this change is recent and many publishers are still implementing the new CrossRef guidelines, either DOI format is acceptable.

**Figure 1.** Location of Digital Object Identifier in Journal Article

to be flexible with publisher identification standards. When a DOI is available, we recommend that you include it in a reference list entry for both print and electronic sources.

The DOI is typically located on the first page of the journal article, near the copyright notice (see Figure 1). The DOI can also usually be found on the database landing page for the source (see Figure 2).

**The linking function of DOIs.** The DOIs in the reference list function as links to the content you are referencing. If you are viewing a digital publication, the DOI may be hidden under a button labeled *Article*, *CrossRef*, *PubMed*, or another full-text vendor name (see Figure 3). Readers can then click on the button to view the version of record of the actual article or other type of source or to view an abstract and be presented with an opportunity to purchase a copy of the item. If the link is not live or if the DOI is referenced in a print publication, the reader can simply enter the DOI into the *DOI Resolver* search field provided by the registration agency (<http://www.crossref.org>) and be directed to the source or a link to purchase it (see Figure 4). Locating the content online with the DOI gives you electronic access to any online supplemental archives associated with the source.

**Providing publication data for electronic sources.** The DOI is now the preferred electronic retrieval format because it provides a persistent link to a document's location on the Internet, regardless of how or where that document may be indexed in various databases or repositories. If no DOI is available, a URL can be included. For reasons described more fully below, it is not necessary to include database information for most references. Sometimes it is difficult to determine which retrieval information is most helpful to the reader. The DOI and URL flowchart (see Figure 5) clarifies how and when to use DOIs, URLs, and database information in your reference list.

**General guidance on including DOIs and URLs.** Provide the DOI, if one has been assigned to the content, exactly as published. Because the DOI string can be long, it is safest to copy and paste whenever possible. Do not add any punctuation after the DOI; this is not a style issue but a retrieval issue.

**Figure 2.** Location of Digital Object Identifier for Article on Database Landing Page

<b>Full Record Display</b>					
Unique Identifier	2008-08834-010				
Title	A taxonomy of behavior change techniques used in interventions.				
Publication Year	2008				
Language	English				
Author	<a href="#">Abraham, Charles</a> ; <a href="#">Michie, Susan</a>				
Email	Abraham, Charles: <a href="mailto:s.c.s.abraham@sussex.ac.uk">s.c.s.abraham@sussex.ac.uk</a>				
Correspondence Address	Charles Abraham, Department of Psychology, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton, England, BN1 9QG, <a href="mailto:s.c.s.abraham@sussex.ac.uk">s.c.s.abraham@sussex.ac.uk</a>				
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Abraham, Charles	Department of Psychology, University of Sussex, Brighton, England				
Michie, Susan	Department of Psychology, University College London, London, England				
Source	Health Psychology. Vol 27(3), May 2008, 379-387.				
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Publisher	American Psychological Association: US				
Other Publishers	Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, US				
Format Availability	Electronic; Print				
Format Covered	Electronic				
Publication Type	Journal; Peer Reviewed Journal				
Document Type	Journal Article				
Digital Object Identifier	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.27.3.379">10.1037/0278-6133.27.3.379</a>				
Keywords	behavior change; intervention; content; techniques; taxonomy; CONSORT				
Index Terms	<a href="#">*Behavior Change</a> ; <a href="#">*Health Promotion</a> ; <a href="#">*Intervention</a> ; <a href="#">*Taxonomies</a>				
Classification Codes	<a href="#">3300 Health &amp; Mental Health Treatment &amp; Prevention</a>				
Population Group	Human				
Methodology	0400 Empirical Study; 1800 Quantitative Study				
Auxiliary Materials	Other (Internet Available)				
Release Date	20080714				

